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# The Habitats of Fairies in Irish Folktales

TAKAKI, Tomoko

## Introduction

In Irish Folktales, fairies appear quite frequently. Fairies, having been reflected by the people's way of thinking from the ancient times, are now a part of Irish culture. In order to figure out how the people think about fairies, their habitat is one of the most important pieces of information.

Katharine Briggs mentions the habitats of British and Irish fairies in, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, that they mostly lived underground (12). She adds that Irish fairies such as "Daoine ó Sidhe" or "Sluagh Sidhe" [trooping fairies] live "in the hollowed hills" (12) or "under natural hillocks" (19). The under-water world and islands are also mentioned but she says that such habitats are less widespread (23). Carolyn White also puts emphasis to fairy underground habitats.<sup>1</sup> The underground habitats include "earthen mounds" as well as "the clefts of hills," "deep mountain caves," and "shallow caves near and beneath the sea" (White 23). On the other hand, Seán Ó Súilleabháin firstly notes on fairy habitat in, *Irish Folk Custom and Belief*, that fairies were said to live in the lisses, or fairy forts, abandoned former homesteads, of which there are thousands throughout the country (91). Adding to "lisses," he mentions "raths," "moats," "hills," "mountains," and "dúin (larger than lisses)" (88-91) as their habitats. He also points out the under-water world (96). Ó Súilleabháin's idea is different from that of Briggs<sup>2</sup> or White's<sup>3</sup> in that fairy habitats are not under the ground but above, such as the places within the lisses/fairy forts. Moreover, the difference will show us that there is still room for further exhaustive and specific research into their habitats. As mentioned above, many researchers commonly indicate that fairy habitats include underground, the lisses/forts above the ground and the under-water world such as the bottom of the sea. The difference of ratio or frequency between each habitat, however, is not yet demonstrated concretely.

Fairy habitats, such as these, have various properties. Dáithí Ó hÓgáin states that the fairy dwellings are beautiful places, decorated with precious metals and with sumptuous food and drink and melodious music (*The Lore of Ireland* 207). Briggs<sup>2</sup> and White<sup>3</sup> also point out the beautiful and gorgeous Elysian descriptions. However, concrete results of the

research into the properties of the habitats has also not yet been presented.

Professor Howard Rollin Patch offers a rich supply of the examples of the otherworld descriptions in medieval Irish literature.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I will present a concrete investigation of Irish folktales, which originated during much earlier, to substantiate his research.

Prof. Patch, in the chapter titled "Among the Celts" in his book, *The Other World*, analyses the descriptions of the otherworld. He states,

The other world of the Celts was in any case located on this earth, often in the west, and sometimes took the form of the Isles of the Blessed, the Land-beneath-the-Waves, the hollow hill, or the land beyond the mist, or varying combinations of these. (27)

The examples presented in this chapter show that the places isolated by the sea, such as islands, or lands beneath the sea, appeared most frequently as the otherworld. He also mentions "síð," or "fairy mound" (41), which appears as a habitat of fairies or gods/goddesses. In studies of fairy habitats in Irish folktales mentioned previously, the under-water world is not emphasized as much as the underground or the places aboveground.

Prof. Patch also provides various examples of the properties of the otherworld. The examples are mainly seen in *The Voyage of Bran* (8th century) (Patch 31), one of the oldest voyage stories left in Ireland, and *The Voyage of Mealdúin* (9th-11th century) (Patch 33), which includes more descriptions about the otherworld than *Bran*. The notable characteristics are; plentifulness of food and drink especially fruits, columns and banquet halls gorgeously ornamented with silver and crystal, sleep-inducing music, songs of birds, fortresses or palaces or splendid houses, and the swift or slow passage of time (Patch 45-59). Thus, there is a difference between the Celtic otherworld in medieval Irish literature shown by Prof. Patch's research and the fairy habitats in Irish folktales that are handed down in oral tradition from the times before Christianity.

This paper aims to clarify the characteristics of fairy habitats by examining evidence found in Irish folktales. In this paper, the analysis will be divided into three sections. In section 1, some proper names which are given to fairy habitats will be examined. In section 2, we will look at the actual places where fairies dwell, and the properties of the habitats are dealt with in section 3.

The texts analysed are nine published collections of Irish folktales: *Folktales of Ireland* (Sean O' Sullivan, 1966), *The Folklore of Ireland* (do.,

1966), *Legends from Ireland* (do., 1966), *Folktales from the Irish Countryside* (Kevin Danaher, 1967), *Fairy Legends from Donegal* (Seán Ó hEochaidh, 1977), *Stories of Sea and Shore* (John Henry, 1983), *Sean Ó Conaill's Book: Stories and Traditions from Iveragh* (Séamus Ó Duilearga, 1981), *Seanchas Annie Bhán: The Lore of Annie Bhán* (Gordon W. MacLennan, 1997), and *Children of Salmon and Other Irish Folktales* (Eileen O' Faolain, 1965). In these texts, fairies appear in 230 tales, and 145 habitats of fairies are found.

### 1. Some Proper Names of Fairy Habitats

Eight proper names of fairy habitats are found as follows:

- "this kingdom of Little Aran" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 187)
- "the Land of Youth" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 224)
- "Tír na hÓige" (MacLennan, 1997: 89-91)
- "the Red Strand" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 221)
- "the Red Wood" (MacLennan, 1997: 219)
- "the Land Beneath the Sea" (Henry, 1983: 52)
- "the World Under the Ground" (Danaher, 1967: 79)
- "Oileán an Iúir" (the Island of Yew Tree) (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 329)

"this kingdom of Little Aran" can be said to have a close resemblance to the real Aran islands from the name "Little Aran," and from its location around Galway Bay, where the real Aran islands are. The Irish words "Tír na hÓige" can be translated into "the Land of Youth." "Tír na hÓige" is one of the paradises dwelled by gods/goddesses in medieval Irish literature. "the Red Strand" and "the Red Wood" has the colour "red" in their names. Ó hÓgáin states that the colour "red" is the colour of fire in Irish ancient belief (*Irish Superstitions* 16). Fire is thought to have been an indispensable but mysterious and dangerous element for ancient people. Ó hÓgáin also points out that the colour "red" is used for describing the ancient god of the dead and his world (*Lore of Ireland* 179). These two habitats may have some connection with such ancient beliefs.

### 2. The Classification of Fairy Habitats

The habitats of fairies can be classified into thirteen locations: the sea and seaside (53 examples), hill and hillside (32), fort/rath/lios (11), field (8), river and riverside (6), lake (5), underground (5), cave (3), woods (3), mountain (2), glen (2), in the sky (2), and others (13).

## 2.1. Sea (53 / 145 = 36.6 %)

Fifty-three cases in which fairies live in the sea or seaside are found. They can be further sub-divided into three categories: (a) In the sea (31 cases), (b) Seaside (15), and (c) Somewhere across the sea (7). The examples are shown as follows:

### (a) In the sea (31 cases)

(1a-1) "The fishermen used to say that there were fairy women **in the sea**, and the name they had for them was bochtógaí." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 205)

(1a-2) "The most beautiful woman he had ever seen rose up out **of the sea** near him, came in on a flat rock, threw off her cloak and left it on the rock beside her." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 223)

The other examples are as follows: "**from the sea**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 188), "**in the sea**" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 69), "**from the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 203), "**rose out of the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 207), "**through the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 209), "**rose out of the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 249-51), "**from the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 335), "**up to the surface** [of the sea]" (Henry, 1983: 55), "**in the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 224), "**out to sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 276), "**towards the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 276), "**in the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 277), "**rose in the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 277), "**for the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 278), "**from the sea**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 281), "**out to sea**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 18), "**the sea**" (Henry, 1983: 44), "**in the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 203), "**into the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 213), "**into the ocean**" (Henry, 1983: 18), "**the Land Beneath the Sea**" (Henry, 1983: 52), "**on this coast**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 257) // "**the King of the Sea**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 118), "**the wee folk of the sea**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 193), "**the sea-gentry**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 201) // "ghost-boats [in the sea] / the back of Slieve League [cliffs along the sea]" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 211), "on the Oitir Mhór [a big undersea bank]" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 335), "fairy currachs [in the sea] / round the coast" (Henry, 1983: 59), "a boat between him and land/ seine-fishing [in the sea]" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 279).

Thirty-one examples of "in the sea" habitats are found. As the two examples above show, fairies appear from or disappear into the sea in a lot

of cases. Examples of "the wee folk of the sea" and "the sea-gentry" are also included here. The daily life of fairies, such as a woman fairy dandling her baby on the surface of the sea, also provide width to support this habitat.

(b) Seaside (15 cases)

(1b-1) "He filled the basket [with stones] and was not far on his way back **across the strand** when he was followed by the immortal host, the whole lot of them shouting with one voice: 'Dirty Tomás Mór, dirty Tomás Mór, Who left us open to the rain forever!' " (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 95)

(1b-2) "It was a fine day as they left home, and they rowed at their ease in by the cliffs. When they got **into the shelter of the Head** they decided to rest a while. They (boat crew) were not long at the foot of the cliff when they heard murmuring sounds inside and then the voices of men calling out for a drop of whatever was in this keg." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 241)

The other examples are as follows: "**on the shore**" (Henry, 1983: 66), "**on the shore**" (Henry, 1983: 69), "**to the shore**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 245) // "**on the beach**" (Henry, 1983: 22) // "**on the strand**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 197), "**on the Red Strand**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 221) // "**of the headland**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 211) // "**of the cove**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 219) // "**by the sand dune** [near the sea]" (Henry, 1983: 36) // "**a cavern** [It opens at both ends to the sea.]" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 247), "[a boat's] **shelter in An Poll Dorcha** [the dark hole]" (Henry, 1983: 47) // "at the foot of **Slieve League** [cliffs along the sea]" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 123), "**west by the back of Oileán Rua** [the red island] / the cliffs [along the sea]" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 195-97).

In fifteen examples of the habitats on the seaside, normal beach or strand is found in eight cases as seen in (1b-1). The example of (1b-2) shows that the habitat is inside a headland-cave, which is used by people as a shelter for their ships on their way from sea. Such a place is found in two other cases.

(c) Somewhere across the sea (7 cases)

(1c-1) "He looked more keenly and saw that it was **an island**. [. . .] the

same island has been seen between Rathlin and the sunset." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 217-219)

The other examples are as follows: "any sight of **the island**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 91) // "**land on the other side of the ocean**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 287), "**the finest strand**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 125), "west above **Killala strand**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 51) // "**Tír na hÓige**" (MacLennan, 1997: 89-91), "**this kingdom of Little Aran**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 187).

The habitats "across the sea" include islands (2 cases), and other places like strands (3). In the example (1c-1), an island and a mass of people are seen in the west sea.

## 2.2. Hill (32 /145 = 22.1 %)

There are thirty-two examples of hills as a habitat. They can be further classified into two categories: (a) Inside a hill (20 cases), (b) Outside a hill (12).

(a) Inside a hill (20 cases)

(2a-1) "They went down a short way and a door opened **into the hill**. They had gone in the short distance when they came to the finest castle Nancy ever seen." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 41)

(2a-2) "They rode along until they reached **a hill, in the side of which was a high, awesome cliff**. It would surprise anybody. A door opened in the cliff, and they entered the finest court that ever rose to the sky." (O' Sullivan, 1974: 102)

The other examples are as follows: "**inside the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 235), "**inside the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 317), "**under the hill**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 27), "**The green hill opened**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 55), "**into the side of the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 121) // "**on the hill/** a high crag/ A door opened" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 173), "**a hill/** inside the crag" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 237), "**the crag** opened" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 61), "**a crag/** A door opened" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 63), "**The crag** opened" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 65), "**the crag** opened" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 77) // "a door opened **in the cliff**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 173), "**a very high, steep cliff at the foot of it** [a hill]" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 59-60), "**a fairy cliff/** inside it" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 141) // "**A rock-face** opened" (Ó hEochaidh,

1977: 71), "the heart of **the rock** in the cleft" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 125), "the foot of **the rock**/ those inside" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 319) // "**the hill/ the earth opened**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 45).

Twenty cases of habitats inside a hill are found. As seen in the two examples above (2a-1) and (2a-2), there is a cliff or a crag/rock on a side of a hill and an entrance. The entrance leads to a habitat inside a hill. Similar situations are found in nineteen other cases. The entrances are directly in a hill itself (6 cases), or in a crag on the side (6), a cliff (4), or a rock (3).

(b) Outside a hill (12 cases)

(2b-1) "**On the top of the hill** a big crowd of the airy host came about him (a priest) [. . .]." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 261)

(2b-2) "Some time afterwards he was out **on the hillside** and a red-haired boy come to him." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 129)

The other examples are as follows: "**up the green hill**" (Danaher, 1967: 54), "**up the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 117), "**to the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 127), "coming **down the hill**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 313) // "**the hill-folk**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 79), "**the hill-folk**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 281), "**the noble people of the hills**" (Henry, 1983: 7) // "**on the hillock**" (Henry, 1983: 33) // "at the top of **the cliff**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 268), "**along the cliff-tops**" (Henry, 1983: 11).

This category consists of the habitats on or near a hill as seen in the examples above. The examples, "the noble people of the hills" and "hill-folk," are also included here.

### 2.3. Fort, rath, lios (11 / 145 = 7.6%)

Fort, rath, and lios are found as fairy habitats in eleven cases.

(3-1) "One Samhain Eve a little hunchback was out walking, and it happened that he went past a **fort**, and the nicest song he had ever heard was being sung **inside the fort**." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 161)

(3-2) "He saw a sow and nine boneens **in the rath**. So he went to hunt the sow back, but the sow wouldn't move, only grunt at him. Then a whole lot of little men came around him [. . .]." (O' Faolain, 1965:



20)

(3-3) "They were crossing through the fields by the Small Strand in the parish of Lispolle. As they were passing **a lios** (fairy fort), they heard the sweetest music in the world. They stopped a while to listen, but saw nobody." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 75)

The other examples are as follows: "a door opened in the side of **the fort**" (Danaher, 1967: 15), "There is **a fort** above here" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 169), "**in some fort**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 258), "**in the fort**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 259), "**a fairy fort**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 30) // "singing **in the rath**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 22), "**Rathmeague rath**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 24) // "out of the lios" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 200).

According to the Irish-English dictionary, *Fócloir Gaeilge-Béarla*, each definition is as follows:

"lios": "enclosed ground of ancient dwelling-place, ring-fort, fairy mound"

"rath": "earthen rampart, earthen ring-fort"

As the definitions show, "ring-fort" is common between both rath and lios, therefore, these fort, rath, and lios are classified into the same category. The examples found are "fort" (6 cases), "rath" (3), and "lios" (2). Each example is shown in (3-1), (3-2), and (3-3) respectively.

The hills classified in the previous section seem to include small hills, which can be close to the forts, raths and lioses.

## 2.4. Field (8 / 145 = 5.5%)

(4-1) One evening he came home very late, and without waiting to eat or drink he lifted his basket and went **to the bog**. (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 117)

The other examples are as follows: "**across the field**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 253-55), "**in the field**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 279) // "**to the bog**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 95), "**in the bog**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 11) // "**Binn Diarmada** [turf field]" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 17) // "**at the sward**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 145) // "**from the bush**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 353).

The habitats of field include bog, turf field, sward, and bush. Eight examples are found here. Four cases are bogs and turf-fields where people go to dig out turf for fuel.

## 2.5. River and riverside (6 / 145 = 4.1 %)

(5-1) "No sooner was the word out of his mouth than they saw seven times their own number of the hill-folk **on the other bank of the river.**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 115)

The other examples are as follows: "**at the river**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 119), "**from the bank of the river**" (Danaher, 1967: 39), "**at the other side of the River Suir**" (Danaher, 1967: 111), "**a river** running beside the road/ at the other side" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 81).

Out of six examples of river and riverside habitats, there are one case of "in a river" and five of riverside. As seen in (5-1), there are three cases where fairies are "on the other side of the river."

## 2.6. Lake (5 / 145 = 3.4%)

(6-1) "With that a rider on a black horse rose out **of the middle of the lake** and rode towards them." (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 111)

The other examples are as follows: "coming out **of the lake**" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 153), "come out **of the lake**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 115), "**to the lake**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 331), "**Loch an Iúir**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 331).

There are five examples of lake. Human figured fairies appear in two cases and horse-figures in two. The examples above show that a man's figure and a horse came up from the lake. And there are two cases in which the habitats are on islands in lakes. Although there are many lakes in Ireland, unexpectedly, fairy habitats in lakes are not so common.

## 2.7. Underground (5 / 145 = 3.4%)

(7-1) "And four boys were poking around the pile of rocks, until they found a rock that they could move, and when they moved it they saw **a big deep hole, just like a well, going down through the ground.** [. . .] "You are not the first one to come on that search," says the king of the country under the ground, [. . .]." (Danaher, 1967: 106-07)

The other examples are as follows: "a huge hole with steps leading down **into the ground**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 146), "the World **Under the Ground**" (Danaher, 1967: 79), "**a big black hole**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 133-35) // "[under] a big stone" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 103).

Underground habitats are found in five cases. Briggs and White consider the hill habitats as part of the underground habitats. In this paper, however, they will be treated separately. There are three cases in which a big hole opens in the ground and it leads to the habitats, as shown in (7-1). An underground world "at the bottom of a well" and a habitat "under a big standing stone" are also found.

### 2.8. Cave (3 / 145 = 2.1%)

(8-1) "There was a spring-water well beside the castle. People didn't make much use of it, for they said that a young, handsome girl was living **in a cave** near the well." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 55)

The other examples are as follows: "**a big rough cave**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 43), "**a quarry-hole**" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 268).

The three cases of cave habitat are considered to be similar to "inside a hill." But while most of the habitats inside a hill have some kind of building to dwell in, the cave habitats are only the cave itself. Accordingly, they are classified differently.

### 2.9. Woods (3 / 145 = 2.1%)

(9-1) "There was a **kind of small wood** near the chapel. He heard music like the singing of a bird there, and went to the door and looked in that direction." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 55)

The other examples are as follows: "**Éadan Wood**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 281), "**the Red Wood**" (MacLennan, 1997: 219).

There are only three examples of woods. Example (9-1) shows a wood habitat where "time passes supernaturally." Another habitat has a name, "the Red Wood." The fairy habitats in woods were hardly mentioned in previous studies.

## 2.10. Mountain (2 / 145 = 1.4%)

(10-1) "It didn't take them long to reach **the top of Croagh Patrick**. [. . .] They were barely there when the Pooka put his horns under a rock that was there and threw it aside to show a fine, wide opening beneath it. The pair of them went in and came to a fine door." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 77)

The other example is, "**the mountainside**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 57).

In one of the two cases of the mountain, the habitat is located inside the mountain. This resembles the habitats inside hills. There seems to be a close relationship between the mountains and hill habitats.

## 2.11. Glen (2 / 145 = 1.4%)

(11-1) "Two men were gathering rushes up above **Gleann an Blaile Dhuibh** [name of a glen] long ago. [. . .] At last, however, who was John talking with but a red-haired girl!" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 179)

The other example is, "**the Glen** river at the waterfall" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 189).

The two examples of glens are similar to the mountain habitats. Since glens are often located near mountains and both are far from human habitats.

## 2.12. In the sky (2 / 145 = 1.4%)

(12-1) "He was being tossed back and forth and at last he was **up above the sky**." (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 273)

The other example is, "**up into the air**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 271).

There are two habitats in the sky. They are quite different from all the other habitats previously considered because none of them are celestial.

## 2.13. Others (13 / 145 = 9.0%)

Habitats in graveyards, Heaven, the same house as humans, and other places are found in thirteen cases.

(13-1) "She set off for **the graveyard**, without any fear. [. . .] She had to open the grave. There was a man in the coffin inside." (O' Sullivan, 1974: 106)

The other examples are as follows: **"the old church ruin"** (Danaher, 1967: 58), **"in the graveyard"** (MacLennan, 1997: 207-17), **"Beárna na Corp"** (the Corpse Gap)" (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 256) // **"Heaven"** (O' Sullivan, 1977: 45), **"from Heaven"** (MacLennan, 1997: 25) // **"some place were gentle"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 97), **"a fairy place"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 327) // **"moving to Ulster"** (O' Sullivan, 1977: 73), **"of Connacht"** (O' Sullivan, 1977: 73), **"to the east"** (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 255) // **"living in it [the same house] as well as themselves"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 101), **"near yourself"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 267).

According to the classifications above, the habitats and their frequencies are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. The classification of fairy habitats**

Sea	In the sea	31	53 (36.6 %)
	Seaside	15	
	Somewhere across the sea	7	
Hill	Inside a hill	20	32 (22.1 %)
	Outside a hill	12	
Fort (rath, lios)			11 (7.6 %)
Field (turf-field, bog, sward, bush)			8 (5.5 %)
River and riverside			6 (4.1 %)
Lake			5 (3.4 %)
Underground			5 (3.4 %)
Cave			3 (2.1 %)
Woods			3 (2.1 %)
Mountain			2 (1.4 %)
Glen			2 (1.4 %)
In the sky			2 (1.4 %)
Others			13 (9.0 %)
Total			145 (100.0 %)

As this table shows, the sea, including seaside and somewhere across the sea, is the most frequent fairy habitat (53 examples), which is 36.6% of all the examples. Briggs and other researchers point out the underground

world and forts on the ground as the dominant habitats of fairies. However, the above results show that sea habitats are the majority of all. This is a fact which is different from previous studies. According to Prof. Patch, a number of islands used during voyages to the sea appear as the otherworld in medieval Irish literature. In this paper, "somewhere across the sea," including islands, habitats are not so frequent (7 cases), but the image of the sea is common between the otherworld in medieval Irish literature and the habitats of the sea in Irish folktales. It, thus, appears that people have had the image of fairies living in the sea from the time before the medieval records were written.

The second most frequent habitat is hill (32 examples, 22.1% of all). Briggs and Ó Súilleabháin mention habitats inside a hill, however, most of the twenty cases of "inside a hill" have a regular pattern in which an entrance opens at the side of a hill and it leads to the habitat under the hill. This feature is also not mentioned by any other researcher.

Next is the habitat of fort/rath/lios (11 examples). It is 7.6% of all the cases. These fort, rath and lios seem to be quite close to the original meaning of "sí," Irish word for "fairies," which indicates "a mound." Ó Súilleabháin states that these places and hills are the most common habitats of fairies (*Custom and Belief* 88). In this research, however, the total number of hills and forts (43) is even less than the number of the sea (53). Consequently, the frequency of forts becomes very low in comparison with hill or sea habitats.

Underground habitats have the sixth highest frequency, consisting of five cases (3.4%). While Briggs and White note that the most common fairy habitats are underground, this research shows a different result challenging the previous studies. Prof. Patch also states that there is hardly a trace of evidence for the idea of a holy mountain in medieval literature (Patch 47). The low frequency of mountains in this examination (2 cases) also supports his results.

We also have two rare cases of sky habitats. Many researchers do not comment about this habitat but Briggs refers to the sky, as "the superterrestrial fairylands" (*Vanishing People* 91). The image of fairies living in the sky might have originated from the image of angels, for angels are thought to be one of the origins of fairies.

The other dwelling places for fairies, such as fields, lakes, caves, woods, and glens are not so frequent. Thus, it can be concluded that various places in nature can be fairy habitats.

### 3. The Properties of Fairy Habitats

In the previous section, we have looked at where fairies actually live, in Irish folktales. In this section, we will look at the properties of these habitats. The properties can be divided into four categories: buildings, interior, the state of inhabitants, and others.

#### 3.1. Building

Twenty-five examples of buildings dwelled by fairies are found. They are "house" (9 examples), "castle" (9), "court" (4), "palace" (2), and "barn" (1), as shown below.

##### (a) House (9 cases)

"The next moment, he was carried off into the air as he slept. When he awoke, he didn't know where he was. He found himself in **a house**, lying near the fire." (O' Sullivan, 1966: 186)

"They both went into a cave in the side of the hill, and inside there was **the finest house** either of them had ever seen." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 237)

The other examples are as follows: "**a beautiful nice lime-white house**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 57), "**a house**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 45), "**the house**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 173), "**a nice little thatched house**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 11), "**a little house**" (Danaher, 1967: 79), "**the house**" (Henry, 1983: 55), "**the house**" (Henry, 1983: 52).

##### (b) Castle (9 cases)

"They had gone in the short distance when they came to **the finest castle** Nancy ever seen." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 41)

"They rode on until they came to **a big castle** which was full of people all eating and drinking." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 63)

The other examples are as follows: "**the griffin's castle**" (Danaher, 1967: 113), "**a big castle**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 65), "**a great court, city and castle inside**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 71), "**a castle**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 43), "**the finest castle**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 221), "**the castle**" (Danaher, 1967: 107), "**a castle**" (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 133-35).

##### (c) Court (4 cases)

"He followed the dog inside and threw the other stone at it and where did he find himself but in **a large court!**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 77)

The other examples are as follows: "**a fine court**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 125), "**the finest court**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 102), "**a great court**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 71).

(d) Palace (2 cases)

"The horseman rode up to the great door of **the palace**, and she was taken down from the horse." (O' Faolain, 1965: 27)

The other example is, "**a fairy palace**" (O' Sullivan, 1966: 169).

(e) Barn (1 case)

"He was brought into **a big barn** up there where there were three of the wee folk with flails and they had almost all his corn threshed." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 271)

Among the twenty-five examples of buildings, there are large buildings such as castles (9 cases); court (4); palace (2), and normal-sized buildings such as houses (9), and barn (1). Adjectives which indicate the size of the buildings are used for "castle" (2), "court" (2), "barn" (1), and "house" (1). In only one case, the adjective "little" is used for "house." In the other five examples, "big," "large," or "great" is used. The other adjectives used are "fine(st)" (5), "nice" (2), and "beautiful" (1). From this, it seems the buildings were often large and fine, but there are no concrete explanations, other than these simple adjectives.

### 3.2. Interior

"The fingers went the other way across my eyes, and there we were before a castle door, and in we went through a big hall and **great rooms all painted in fine green colours, with red and gold bands and ornaments, and the finest carpets and chairs and tables and window curtains**, and fine ladies and gentlemen walking about." (O' Faolain, 1965: 43)

The other examples are as follows: "**a fine chamber**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 55), "**a fine door/ a beautiful room with grand furniture**" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 77-78).



Only three examples describing the interior are found. This is a small number compared to the examples of buildings. The adjectives used to express their beauty are "fine(st)" (6), "nice" (2), "beautiful" (2). Ó hÓgáin and other researchers point out the gorgeousness of the fairy habitats in Irish folktales as well as Patch's otherworld properties in medieval Irish literature. However, the habitats in this analysis are described only by simple adjectives with few rich and gorgeous explanations. Therefore, it can be said that there is no particular emphasis on the appearance of fairy buildings in Irish folktales.

### 3.3. The state of inhabitants

#### (a) A multitude of fairies (14 cases)

"The place was **full of people —men and women everywhere—** but she recognized nobody." (O' Sullivan, 1966: 169)

"About **a hundred old women** were seated at a large table in the middle of the floor." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 77-78)

The other examples are as follows: "**twelve ladies-in-waiting**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 27), "**a big crowd of people**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 77), "**many people**" (O' Sullivan, 1974: 102), "**full of people**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 63), "**full of children**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 71), "**a great many people**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 45), "**full of people**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 173), "**full up of little people, men and women, young and old**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 55), "**fine ladies and gentlemen**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 43), "**many people**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 33), "**many people**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 133-35), "**a mass**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 217-219).

#### (b) Music, dance, drinking, eating (19 cases)

"There was a big crowd of people in it who were **dancing, drinking and singing.**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 77)

"She went in, and there were a great many people inside **dancing and singing, and plenty of whiskey** was being passed around." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 45)

The other examples are as follows: "**sweet music**" (Danaher, 1967: 39), "**the loveliest of music and singing**" (O' Faolain, 1965: 22) "**eating and drinking**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 63), "**fine music/ fine**

**dancing**" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 77-78), **"the most beautiful singing"** (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 237), **"some food"** (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 173), **"music"** (O' Faolain, 1965: 55), **"music** like the singing of a bird" (O' Sullivan, 1977: 55-56), **"the nicest song"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 161), **"the grandest music"** (Ó Duilearga, 1948: 259), **"the fairy music"** (Henry, 1983: 33), **"wonderful singing/ the grandest music"** (O' Faolain, 1965: 21), **"dancing"** (O' Faolain, 1965: 33), **"music of a sort"** (Henry, 1983: 36), **"all kinds of food and drink"** (Danaher, 1967: 107), **"singing/ eating and drinking"** (ÓhEochaidh, 1977: 133-35).

In their habitats, fairies often gather in groups (14 cases). They also frequently enjoy "music" (9 cases), "singing, song" (7), "drinking" (5), "eating" (4), and "dance" (4). These activities are often held at the same time, such as seen in the two examples above. The nineteen examples include one or more of these actions. These properties are significant features. If people imagine a kind of Elysium in fairy habitat, this result shows that they put great importance on enjoying, eating, drinking, playing music and dancing even in the Elysium, just as they do in their daily lives.

### 3.4. Other properties

#### (a) Time (3 cases)

"He went ashore on very rough ground and had not gone far before he felt something was hampering him. He stayed there until the girl was **seven years** old. [. . .] The maid was standing in the middle of the floor with the measure of meal, **just as she had been when he left.**" (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 287)

" 'I don't know anything about them either,' said the old man. 'But there's a great story about a priest who was here **a couple of hundred years ago**. He went out on a Sunday morning, wearing his Mass vestments, and he never came back since. Nobody knows where he went to.' When the priest heard these words, he became a very old, decrepit man, and he died without delay." (O' Sullivan, 1977: 55-56)

"When he had been there **a couple of years** [. . .] Oisín fell, **a withered, grey, weak, old man**, lying there unable to move" (MacLennan, 1997: 91-95).

## (b) Elysian (1 case)

**"It was a lovely, rich, fine place as she had said. There was no sickness or oppression. There was no sadness or affliction, no hunger or pain, no worry of any kind. But every single day was nicer than the day before."** (MacLennan, 1997: 91-95)

## (c) Function of the dwelling place (2 cases)

**"It had submerged** again. Often since then the same island has been seen between Rathlin and the sunset." (Ó hEochaidh, 1977: 217-219)

**"They say that Tonn Tóime (a wave of a supernatural character) becomes bared of water every seventh year. [ . . . ] If he could take the cloak safely to high water mark, the magic land would remain dry forever."** (O' Sullivan, 1977: 69).

Three cases in which time passes supernaturally are found. An example shows that time passes much faster in fairy habitats. In this case, time has hardly passed in the human world while seven years has passed in the fairy habitat.

In two of them, time passes slower in the fairy habitat than in the human world. For example, when a priest comes back from the woods to a chapel, a couple of hundred years have already passed there. Briggs, Patch and other researchers also mention time passing supernaturally in these cases. The result shows that people imagine that time passes differently in fairy habitats.

There is also a case in which habitants have no worries of any kind such as in an Elysium as seen in (b). Two examples describing the function of the dwelling place are also found, as in examples (c) above. One is a fairy island submerged under the sea. The other is the case in which a fairy habitat at the bottom of the sea is revealed and covered again by the waves.

### Summary

In order to capture the entire picture of fairies, it is imperative to classify and examine their habitats, their appearance, their supernatural powers, and the plot patterns of Irish folktales involving fairies. This paper places specific emphasis on fairy habitats.

There are eight proper names of the habitats. "Tír na hÓige," which is

one of the Elysiums in medieval Irish literature, is included as one of them. This may suggest that people have handed down the tales by oral tradition from the time before the medieval records were written. The colour "red" is used in names such as "the Red Strand" and "the Red Wood." Red was the colour of fire and the land of the dead in ancient beliefs. These two names might be based on such beliefs from ancient times.

The sea habitat is the most frequent (53 examples, 36.6% of all the habitats). This is different from previous studies. Therefore, it can be said that fairies have a close relationship with the sea. The second most frequent habitats are hills (32 examples, 22.1% of all). Fort/rath/lios are found in eleven cases (7.6%). It is the third highest frequency. These places seem to be closely related to the mounds which Irish "sí" [fairies] originally referred to. Accordingly, it cannot be concluded that "sí" [fairies] are derived from the people of "sí" [a mound]. The origins of fairies seem to be more diverse. The diversity can also be seen by the fact that fairy habitats are located in various natural places.

As for the properties of habitats, buildings are the most frequent (25 cases). They are described by adjectives such as "big," "large," "fine," "beautiful" and so on, with few concrete descriptions of gorgeousness.

Fairies also often seem to gather in crowds (14 cases), enjoy "music" (9 cases), "singing, song" (7), "drinking" (5), "eating" (4), and "dance" (4). Thus, in Irish folktales, it can be said that people visualize fairies' lives as enjoying popular amusements rather than the gorgeousness of their habitats. Other properties such as the supernatural time-passing are also seen in the habitats.

In conclusion, fairy habitats are found in various natural places familiar to people such as in the sea or in hills. In addition, it is fair to speculate that the fairies lead lives similar to humans, in their habitats.

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- 1 White notes on fairy habitats as follows: "Ever since the Tuatha Dé Danann agreed to abandon the sun-ruled land to humans, fairies have made their homes in underground places, emerging only after the moon has ushered mortals to bed." (22)
  - 2 Briggs states that the fairy palace stood at the top of the Tor, full of lights and splendour and sweet music, and the King was seated at a rich banquet, waited on by pages in scarlet and blue (*Tradition and Literature* 13).
  - 3 White also mentions as the following: "Like mortal homes fairy palaces are diverse in construction and arranged according to individual taste. But fairies, being a gaudy lot, prefer crystal outer walls, gilded floors and silver columns. Sea palaces, due to their favourable location, are ornamented with pearls." (24)

- 4 The texts Prof. Patch uses are in the manuscripts collection such as the Book of Leinster (12<sup>th</sup> cent.) and the Book of the Dun Cow (late 11<sup>th</sup> cent.), made 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The texts include legends of saints, voyages to scattered islands, the mythological cycle, the Ulster cycle, the Fenian cycle, etc.

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